

A Message from the Dean of the Graduate School

The Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences: a base for graduate school education in Northern Tohoku

Iijima Hirotugu, Dean of the Graduate School

The Hirosaki University Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (master's program) was established in April 1999. In the more than twenty years since its founding, we have turned out many highly specialized graduates in the humanities and social sciences, fulfilling our responsibility as one of the major centers of master's program education in the humanities and social sciences in Northern Japan.

The Graduate School curriculum covers most of the specialized disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including archeology, literature, the arts, philosophy, history, linguistics, international regional studies, law, political science, economics and accounting. Students participate in lectures as well as hands-on seminars, practicums and fieldwork. They also choose a research theme that best suits their interests and goals.

Students engage in a diversity of research subjects. For example, one archeology student examined the distribution of the sake drinking vessels and related materials that had been unearthed at a local archeological site and used these findings to chronicle the social conditions of the time. A law student clarified the legal issues related to "long working hours" by going through a vast number of research papers and judicial case studies and comparing them with actual changes in workplace environments. These and other research projects have been undertaken resolutely and meticulously, and the degrees received are a reflection of how highly their work has been judged.

Another characteristic of the master's program curriculum is our embrace of cross-disciplinary thinking. When our master's students turn their attention to a particular issue, they usually find that a number of related issues enter into their field of vision. Instead of treating these seemingly tangential issues with only passing interest, they expand these into a larger academic thread by utilizing the expertise and methodological approaches of faculty members in other disciplines.

In April 2020, the Graduate School underwent a comprehensive reorganization. The purpose of the reorganization was to overhaul the graduate school curriculum in order to better reflect the unique characteristics and resources of the Graduate School. The revamped curriculum now provides students the opportunity to engage in specialized study, while at the same time taking a cross-disciplinary approach to their particular field of interest. All courses of study have been consolidated into a single "Department of Humanities and Social Sciences" with more than 100 specialized courses. In addition, new multi-disciplinary courses that examine major contemporary issues from a variety of academic perspectives have been introduced. Furthermore, opportunities for students to present their research in open forums have been expanded to provide a more proactive setting for inter-disciplinary discussion.

Today, advances in science and technology, including those in the information field, are proceeding rapidly. However, at the same time, many social issues remain unresolved. Global environmental problems and disparities in wealth and education have yet to be ameliorated. Humankind must not continue to move forward in an uncontrolled manner. Instead, we should make use of technology by taking human activities themselves into consideration. Specializing in the study of the humanities and social sciences can serve as a direct response to the challenges facing humanity as a whole. Thinking in cross-disciplinary ways may open paths to the solution of these problems.

The goal of the new Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, located in Hirosaki, a college town blessed with rich educational resources, is to turn out graduates who, through the acquisition of specialized knowledge and skills as well as a broad perspective and cross-disciplinary thinking and analysis, can come to grips with the various social and economic issues we face.

